

# Assessment of NOAA’s Dr. Nancy Foster Scholarship Program Statement of Work

2021

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*The National Marine Sanctuary Foundation (Foundation) in cooperation with NOAA’s Office of National Marine Sanctuaries is requesting an assessment of the Dr. Nancy Foster Scholarship Program to increase representation of underrepresented students—U.S. groups who are historically, consistently, and presently underrepresented in and/or excluded from science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) fields, such as African Americans or Blacks, American Indian, Indigenous peoples, Alaska Natives, Hispanic/Latinos, Native Hawaiians, and other Pacific Islanders.*

*Proposals to complete this statement of work are due by May 31, 2021. Applicants will be notified if they were selected to complete the statement of work by June 18, 2021 with work expected to start by July 1, 2021.*

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## Statement of Work Part A: Overview and Products

### **National Marine Sanctuary Foundation Overview**

The **National Marine Sanctuary Foundation**, established in 2000, is the official non-profit partner of the National Marine Sanctuary System. The Foundation directly supports America's national marine sanctuaries through our mission to protect species, conserve ecosystems and preserve America's maritime heritage. We accomplish our mission through community stewardship and engagement programs, on-the-water conservation projects, public education and outreach programs, and scientific research and exploration. The Foundation fosters innovative projects that are solution-oriented, scalable and transferable, and develop strategic partnerships that promote the conservation and recovery of species and their habitats.

### **NOAA's Office of National Marine Sanctuaries Overview**

Managed by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the [National Marine Sanctuary System](#) includes 14 national marine sanctuaries, and two marine national monuments, Papahānaumokuākea and Rose Atoll (two of the largest marine protected areas in the world). This system encompasses more than 620,000 square miles of marine and Great Lakes waters from Washington State to the Florida Keys, and from Lake Huron to American Samoa. Since 1972, NOAA's Office of National Marine Sanctuaries (ONMS) has worked cooperatively with the public and federal, state, local and tribal officials to promote conservation while allowing compatible commercial and recreational activities. National marine sanctuaries are places where anyone can go to experience the power and beauty of the ocean and Great Lakes and participate in recreational activities in protected natural settings. They are sources of inspiration, recreation, rejuvenation, and discovery and they enhance our understanding of our cultural connections to the ocean and Great Lakes. Increasing public awareness of our marine heritage, scientific research, monitoring, exploration, education, and outreach programs are just a few of the ways ONMS fulfills its mission to the American people. Our nation's sanctuaries can provide a safe habitat for species close to extinction or protect historically significant shipwrecks. Natural classrooms, cherished recreational spots and valuable commercial industries — marine sanctuaries represent many things to many people.

### **NOAA's Dr. Nancy Foster Scholarship Program Overview**

The Dr. Nancy Foster Scholarship Program provides support for master and doctoral degrees in oceanography, marine biology, or maritime archaeology—this can include but is not limited to ocean and/or coastal: engineering, social science, marine education, marine stewardship, resource management disciplines—and particularly encourages women and members of minority groups to apply. The scholarship supports independent graduate-level research through financial support of graduate degrees in such fields. Special outreach efforts are employed to

solicit applications from women and members of minority groups. Scholarships are distributed by disciplines, institutions, and geography, and by degree sought, with selections within distributions based on financial need, the potential for success in a graduate level studies program (academic achievement), and the potential for achieving research and career goals. The program is administered through the NOAA Office of National Marine Sanctuaries and is funded annually with 1% of the amount appropriated each fiscal year to carry out the National Marine Sanctuaries Act. As referenced in the legislation, the Dr. Nancy Foster Scholarship is specifically called out in 16 U.S. Code § 1445c-1 - Dr. Nancy Foster Scholarship Program. The purpose of the Dr. Nancy Foster Scholarship Program is to recognize outstanding scholarship in marine biology, oceanography, or maritime archaeology, particularly by women and members of minority groups, and encourage independent graduate level research in such fields of study.

### **Project Objective**

Since the scholarship began in 2000, the vast majority of former Dr. Nancy Foster Scholars are women (89%), which is one goal of this scholarship program. However, only 17% of former scholars have identified themselves as minorities, which isn't representative of the U.S. population. Under the auspices of the federal government scholars cannot be selected based on gender, race, or ethnicity. Over the last several years, staff have worked towards ensuring more women and particularly minorities apply, and ultimately get selected for the Dr. Nancy Foster Scholarship Program. Examples include improving the financial review process and increased targeted recruitment to minority serving institutions and historically black colleges who offer marine science related degrees.

Through this statement of work, NOAA is looking for more ways to reduce barriers to increase representation of U.S. groups who are historically, consistently, and presently underrepresented in and/or excluded from STEM fields, such as African Americans or Blacks, American Indian, Indigenous peoples, Alaska Natives, Hispanic/Latinos, Native Hawaiians, and other Pacific Islanders. Overall, the intent of this statement of work is to provide recommendations to increase the diversity of scholars. This specifically includes topics focused around the following tasks:

1. Task 1: Determine barriers to increasing the diversity of scholars through a justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion (JEDI) lens
2. Task 2: Outline past and current practices, and introduce ideas for the future through interviews
3. Task 3: Identify opportunities to highlight success stories of diverse scholars

## **Statement of Work Part B: Tasks and Timeline**

### **Project Manager Tasks**

The National Marine Sanctuary Foundation seeks a short-term contract to support programs under a federal cooperative agreement to work with project leads at NOAA's Office of National Marine Sanctuaries to develop products that will provide clear direction and guidance on future strategies that will enhance the program's diversity. Specifically, we are requesting a review that

looks at our current practices and outlines recommendations for the future. For this contract, the project manager will submit a proposal and if selected work closely with National Marine Sanctuary Foundation Staff, national marine sanctuary staff, current Dr. Nancy Foster Scholars, and alumni.

**Task 1: Determine barriers to increasing the diversity of scholars through a justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion (JEDI) lens**

- Develop a detailed literature review and analysis based on best practices, research, interviews, and other graduate-level scholarship programs and clearly document how they address barriers of reaching women, and particularly underrepresented students through their program, in their scholarship materials, and through their selection process.
- Based on the literature review and analysis, assess Dr. Nancy Foster Scholarship's Notice of Federal Funding Opportunity announcement to identify potential barriers for underrepresented students in the application and review process. Provide recommendations for how the application and the review process can be modified to remove these barriers.
- Develop contact list of Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs), Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and other associations/organizations that would be ideal targets for student scholarship recruitment. The focus should be on institutions with aquatic/marine/ocean, environmental science, and/or maritime heritage programs, which would make for easier collaborations and partnerships with NOAA's national marine sanctuaries field offices. This contact list should include specific points of contact at these MSIs and HBCUs, such as professors, researchers, advisors, etc. and their contact information.
- Develop and/or identify training and/or training materials to educate Dr. Nancy Foster Scholarship Program reviewers and staff on the potential for implicit bias.
  - Deliverable: A toolbox of training and/or training materials to educate staff on implicit bias.
- Identify the best ways to recruit diverse and underrepresented applicants to the Dr. Nancy Foster Scholarship, including key conferences, potential media, outreach products, site visits, webinars, etc.
  - Deliverable: Detailed list of ways to market the scholarship to reach our target audience of women and underrepresented students.

**Task 1 Deliverables:**

1. Detailed list of graduate-level, federally-managed scholarships and how they address barriers of reaching underrepresented students. Note that final recommendations cannot include selection of scholars based on gender, race, and/or ethnicity.
2. Based on research, provide a list of suggested changes to the application, review, and selection process of the Notice of Funding Opportunity for the Dr. Nancy Foster Scholarship Program to remove potential barriers and increase the likelihood for underrepresented students to apply and be selected for the scholarship.

3. By region, a list of MSIs and HBCUs that would be targets for student scholarship recruitment, including appropriate contact information for advisors, professors, and mentors.

**Task 2: Outline past and current practices, and introduce ideas for the future through interviews**

- Interview current and former Dr. Nancy Foster Scholars. Example questions may include:
  - What should current and former scholars' roles be in increasing diversity?
  - Do scholars have ideas on how best to address diversity in this scholarship within the framework of government requirements? Note that we cannot select scholars based on gender, race, and/or ethnicity.
  - What was the most challenging part of applying for the Dr. Nancy Foster Scholarship from your perspective?
  - What services did you or do you need to achieve success (i.e. financial planning, health insurance, mental health services)?
  - If you could change anything about the funding or timing of the scholarship, what would it be?
  - Was it challenging for you to ensure that all of your research takes place in or benefits one or more national marine sanctuaries?
- Interview a subset of site research coordinators and superintendents. Example questions may include:
  - Do research coordinators and superintendents have ideas on how best to address diversity in this scholarship within the framework of government requirements?
  - If we change or remove certain aspects of the application process, such as not requiring letters of recommendation, how do you think this impacts the scholarship process?
  - If scholars who need more assistance are selected, will you and/or your field site be able to assist and mentor scholars more than in years past? What would you need to accomplish that?
- Interview NOAA's Office of National Marine Sanctuaries leadership. Example questions may include:
  - Does leadership have ideas on how best to address diversity in this scholarship within the framework of government requirements?
  - How do you view the conflict between the scholarship diversity goals and the constraints on selecting scholars based on gender, race, and/or ethnicity?
  - What do you want to see coming out of this scholarship program?
  - Is it important to you that all research take place in or benefits one or more national marine sanctuaries?
  - If scholars that need more assistance are selected, does leadership support field site superintendents and staff mentoring scholars more than in years past?

- Interview external partners, including NFS and EPA, along with other NOAA student scholarships (e.g., EPP, Hollings). Example questions may include:
  - What are some ideas on how NOAA can best address diversity in this scholarship?
  - Is it a major obstacle that all research takes place in or benefits one or more national marine sanctuaries?

**Task 2 Deliverables:**

Executive summaries for each subset of interviewees, and one final aggregated recommendation report: with approximately:

- 1) five current and five former scholars;
- 2) four program staff;
- 3) four site research coordinators and four superintendents;
- 4) two leadership staff; and
- 5) five external partners.

Note: The final number of interviews that take place for each subset and the specific interview questions must be created in consultation with ONMS staff, since only a few examples were provided.

**Task 3: Identify opportunities to highlight success stories of scholars, with an emphasis on underrepresented scholars**

- Look back at all of the scholar’s research and summarize the following:
  - Number of scholars that did work in each national marine sanctuary.
  - Research categories (e.g., passive acoustic monitoring, marine mammals, coral reef ecosystems).
  - Highlight examples of conservation and resource protection efforts that have greatly benefitted the National Marine Sanctuary System (e.g., discovery of manta ray nursery in Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary, which was used during the expansion process of this MPA).
  - Highlight other ways scholars have benefitted ONMS (e.g., assistance in developing condition reports, creation of alumni network, lionfish infographic).
- Provide guidance on ways to better highlight conservation, resource protection, and career accomplishments from scholars—particularly underrepresented scholars—including how scholars are helping protect resources.

**Task 3 Deliverables:**

1. Report on short summaries of scholar’s research using guidance from above. Format to be determined upon consultation with ONMS staff.
2. Summary of effective ways to highlight scholar’s accomplishments.

**Proposed Budget**

Develop your budget to reflect all three tasks outlined above. Please divide your budget into phases per the tasks noted above, as contract payments will be made as phases are

completed. Budgets should not exceed \$50,000, and the expectation is that most budget responses will fall between \$25,000 and \$50,000.

### **Project Schedule**

Once a fully countersigned agreement is in place with the selected contractor, all final products are due by October 22, 2021. ONMS staff are located in Silver Spring, MD, as well as in various national marine sanctuary field offices around the country, including in East and West Coast U.S. time zones. The project manager will work remotely, and communication with ONMS staff is to take place through video chat bi-weekly or when requested by either party. In the first week following the award, the contractor will work with the scholarship team to determine and assess if deliverables are attainable within the time frame developed.

**Proposals are due by 11:59pm (your local time zone) May 31, 2021 to the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation ([rfp@marinesanctuary.org](mailto:rfp@marinesanctuary.org)) with the subject “Assessment of NOAA’s Dr. Nancy Foster Scholar Program Statement of Work.”** Proposals to meet the statement of work as outlined below should be no longer than four pages. C/V and supplemental materials do not count towards the four-page limit.

1) Project Description (no more than four pages)

Explanation of how you and/or your organization would meet the statement of work, including:

- Experience with assessing federally-managed graduate-level scholarship programs and using a justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion (JEDI) lens on applications, review, and selection processes.
- Experience working to remove barriers and/or increase access for underrepresented students to STEM or other disciplines.
- Experience working with or recruitment of underrepresented students (with an emphasis on graduate-level students).
- Experience of implicit bias training.
- Experience with MSIs and HBCUs and how best to engage these target audiences.
- Experience with leading effective interview processes to gather data and make recommendations.
- Knowledge and familiarity with NOAA and national marine sanctuaries.

2) C/V

3) Supplemental Materials

- Example of other work you and/or your organization have done with increasing diversity, access, or work with underrepresented graduate students.
- Any experience working with federally-managed scholarship programs.

### **Project Management**

#### Reporting

Dr. Nancy Foster Scholarship Team will facilitate frequent virtual check-ins with the project manager. The actual meeting schedule will be determined in consultation with

ONMS and Foundation staff. Dr. Nancy Foster Scholarship Team will work with National Marine Sanctuary Foundation staff to approve the scope of work changes and adjustments and sign off on deliverables and timelines. The Dr. Nancy Foster Scholarship Team will facilitate the adoption plan and maintain resources once the project period is completed.

#### Payment

Invoices will be processed through the Foundation after a third of the deliverables have been successfully completed. The following payment of a third of the budget will be processed when the next batch of deliverables have been successfully completed. The remaining third of the budget will be processed when all deliverables from the three tasks have been completed. All aspects of work should be between \$25,000-\$50,000.

Note that the selected contract will support the scope of a federal cooperative agreement between the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation and NOAA Office of National Marine Sanctuaries, and this contract is being competitively selected under the rules of 2 CFR Part 200 and all applicable appendices. All funds received by the selected short-term contractor are considered federally-sourced funds.

Also note that the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation works cooperatively with NOAA's Office of National Marine Sanctuaries on a wide variety of education and public engagement projects, including some orientation and training aspects of the Dr. Nancy Foster Scholarship Program. However, the Nancy Foster Scholars Program is a government program managed by NOAA and the results of the work by the selected contractor will be considered recommendations only and do not constitute final acceptance by NOAA for future scholarship applications or related guidance, even if the NOAA team collaborating with the contractor considers recommendations by contractor as final and complete.

#### Terms

All materials, activities, and products are considered work-for-hire and will be National Marine Sanctuary Foundation products shared exclusively with ONMS and contain ONMS and/or Foundation logos and branding.

### **QUESTIONS**

If you have questions prior to submitting a response to this RFP, please contact Deanna Balistreri, Contracts and Grants Manager for the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation, at [deanna@marinesanctuary.org](mailto:deanna@marinesanctuary.org). Your question may be directed to and the response may come from another member of the National Marine Sanctuary Foundation team or from NOAA's Office of National Marine Sanctuary, the cooperative partner on this project. Please allow 2 to 3 business days for a response, although most questions will likely be answered more quickly.